

MAGIC, GOOD AND BAD

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it possible for the owner to go to war without being harmed. Even were the possessor of such a *drogue* to be struck by a bullet, the wound would be a minor one; while the thrust of a machete or saber would leave him unscathed, poison placed in drink or food would be impotent, and a trap set against the warrior would be ineffective. Some *drogues*, it is held, allow the owner to disappear when trapped by enemies. For such an important *drogue* a special day, designated by its maker, is set aside for the observance of certain taboos, the most important being the requirement of sexual abstinence on that day.⁴ Some men possess as many as seven of these *drogues*, in which case one day every seventh week is reserved for each. Said a man who had taken part in the rebellion of 1918-20 against the Marine occupation: "I have a small, small *drogue*. I had it in the Caco fighting. I have need of a big one." When it was observed that there is no more fighting in Haiti, the reply came promptly: "A man must be prepared. Nobody, knows what will come."

The grandfather of this man was said by him to have owned a *drogue* which came from Guinée. He knew how to resuscitate those who had met their death from unnatural — magical — causes; he had only to come to the *barrière* before the house where the body lay, call the name of the victim, and the dead would arise. He was once attacked when he was returning home with a purse filled with money he had won at cards, and his assailants beat him to death and threw him into a well. The next morning, when he was found, he revived in a few moments and asked to be buried beside the well. The following day one of the men who had assaulted him died; the next day another died, and so for five days, until all of them were dead.

Love-charms form an important category of good magic, as also charms to aid in selling in the markets or in keeping a job or to hold the affection of a spouse. Old men are believed to have important magical powers for good, and one such

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72 Services for the Loa

588 does not marry his horse. People marry people. Loa marry loa. A man
 588 may have a compact with a loa. That is not a marriage. Some of the
 184 things that are going on down there in the Plain are not right. They
 are not the old way. In the old days we did things differently. We
 did not always run to the houngan. The grand famille knew how to
 talk to the loa. Up here we don't do things the way they do them down
 below in the city. People marry people. Loa marry loa."

588 Nevertheless, the practice in the neighborhood of Port-au-Prince and
 776 the Cul-de-Sac Plain is for mystic marriages to take place when deemed
 184 useful, essential, or unavoidable. Foremost among the loa involved in
 these rites is Ezilié Wèdo, the "pure" one, the deity of love, sometimes
 identified with the Virgin Mary. Other loa known to have taken part
 in mystic marriages are Damballa, Ogoun, Ayida, Agwé, Gédé Nimbo
 or one of his brothers, Cousin Zaka, and Général Clermeil. All these
 loa—significantly, I think—have clearly defined personalities; much is
 known about their character and behavior, their likes and dislikes.

588 A man married to Ezilié has special obligations to her for the dura-
 834 tion of his life. On certain days (especially Thursday, which is sacred to
 this deity), the mortal "husband" may not have sexual intercourse, even
 though he has a human wife.

588 Circumstances leading to a mystic marriage vary widely, but in each
 755 case it is a cult priest who determines whether the rites should be
 793 held. Perhaps a person has been afflicted with a series of illnesses or mis-
 776 fortunes. He goes to his houngan, who begins a series of communica-
 tions with the client's loa or with his own. Sometimes many loa are
 consulted before the desired information is available. Eventually it is
 determined that a certain deity, for reasons which may or may not
 be clear, wishes to have nuptial ties with the client. The illnesses or mis-
 753 fortunes that have been sent are a means of informing or warning the
 776 person concerned.

Sometimes the houngan relies on well-established divining methods
 to ascertain the cause of the difficulties. He may employ the *gembo*
 (a shell that slides on a string), ashes, or small shells that are thrown on
 787 the ground. Or he may rely on possession by a loa to provide the in-
 formation.

If it is found that a loa is demanding marriage, arrangements are
 then made. The rites that follow may take place in a hounfor or at the
 house of the human bride or groom. Both a *prêt' savane* and a houngan
 officiate.

588 The person directly involved, like the loa, usually has something to
 554 gain from a mystic marriage. For one thing, he can reasonably expect

120 *Land and Work*

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rhythmically, to the accompaniment of drums, *catus*, or horns, while a singing leader composes topical songs in which the laborers join.

The tools which a rural Haitian chooses, and the way he uses them, often are in a West African tradition. He performs a multitude of tasks with his machete, or bush knife: weeding a garden, peeling an orange, cutting down a tree, making a drum or mortar, opening a coconut. It is an all-purpose tool, as it is in Africa. Until a few years ago it was supplemented by the extra-long, *h. zvier*, "double machete." The axe and the chisel are known and used too, but the machete is supreme.

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The hoe is the tool for tilling the soil, even in the flat country, and even though the Haitian has horses and cattle which could pull a plow. Horses are for riding and not for pulling. In carrying loads, the Haitian peasant still prefers the head to the shoulders. If he has a donkey, the donkey will carry for him. An old Haitian proverb goes: "*Meçi Bondieu pou' boutrique là, si nou pa gainyain boutrique là faut Haitien poté tout bagaille*" (Thank God for the donkey, if we didn't have the donkey the Haitian would have to carry everything). Generally speaking, the rough and rocky terrain of Haiti and inadequate secondary roads have done nothing to encourage the use of carts or wagons.

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Corn is stored in the trees, as in West Africa, or in granaries built upon stilts, also as in West Africa. The Haitian makes his fire in the African fashion, with several long sticks or poles meeting point-to-point in the heart of the fire. As the ends are consumed, the sticks are pushed toward the center. Grain is pulverized in large wooden mortars, as in West Africa, and winnowed in a woven tray. Fish traps are sometimes woven in the traditional West African manner, and fishermen often set their nets in converging spirals and beat the water with sticks to drive the fish to the center. And on the rivers and lakes are to be seen dugout canoes of a kind familiar on the inland waters of West Africa.

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The folklore of the fields contains many themes known to the West African. One old Haitian farmer, discussing the spiritual relationship of the planter to the earth, declared that a man must be strong and potent when he plants, else the crops will be vitiated and sickly. For this reason, he said, a man must not plant seeds the day after he has had sexual intercourse, because he has been temporarily drained of his life-giving powers.⁹

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The tale of the hoe that worked by itself in the fields is also widespread. It enters many animal and Bouki stories, and also is known in a form that is familiar in West Africa. In this story, there was once a man who owned a hoe which worked by itself whenever a magical formula was pronounced. It would stop working whenever the magical

9 [For footnote, see Category 116, p. 352; -- Analyst]

[The Vodoun Pantheon]

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the earth like the carrying pad that women wear to support bundles on their heads. Whenever Ayida Wèdo shifted his position there were earthquakes. When the rainbow appeared after a rain it was said that Ayida had come out from under the earth to drink of the fresh water. [776, 171, 821]

DAMBALLA GRAND CHIMIN (Damballa of the Highway). Another manifestation of Damballa as a protector of those on long journeys. [484]

DAMBALLA VIERRE. Another manifestation of Damballa.

DIMBETI WÈDO. Considered to be the daughter of Damballa. The ending of her name (-ti) suggests that at one time she may have been considered a wife rather than a daughter.

DONKÈ WÈDO. A member of Damballa's family.

ANLO WÈDO. A member of Damballa's family. Said to be a "work loa" who aids men with their gardens, especially in time of illness. [241]

ÈZILIE DOBA, or **DOUNA**, sometimes spelled **ÈZALIE**. One of the "big" loa of the Dahomé pantheon, a symbol of purity, and sometimes identified with the Virgin Mary. Her color is white, and services to her include a ritual sweeping and sprinkling of the earth and a perfuming of the air. Food offerings to her include corn meal and eggs. Male "horses" of Èzilie are sometimes bound to her by mystic marriages, and they are obligated to refrain from sexual intercourse on certain days which belong to her. There are a number of Èzilies, regarded as members of the same family or, in some cult centers, as different manifestations of the same deity. Some Haitians regard Èzilie Doba as the ancestor of the Èzilie family and refer to her as Grand Èzilie. Note that there is a Dahomean town named Dogha at approximately 6° 6' E., 6° 30' N. [177, 822, 782, 787, 834, 588]

ÈZILIE FRÉDA, or **ÈZILIE DADOMAIN** (Dahomé), or **ÈZILIE FRÉDA DADOMAIN**. Like Èzilie Doba, she is a symbol of purity and is identified with the Virgin Mary. Mystic marriages are performed with her, and her "horses" are obligated to refrain from sexual intercourse on certain days. She is also a giver of wealth. [177, 588, 787, 834]

ÈZILIE WÈDO. A sister or daughter of Èzilie Doba and also related to Damballa.

ÈZILIE MANHOL. A sister of Èzilie Fréda.

ÈZILIE BANDA. A manifestation of Èzilie who is especially fond of the Banda dance.

ÈZILIE JÉBOUOK (Red Eyes). A stern and hard Èzilie who is often identified with Pétro rather than Dahomé rites.

ALISON FRÉDA. A member of the Èzilie escorte, regarded as a market-place protector. In Dahomey, Alison was a protector of all public gathering places. [443, 771]

ALISON BALAKÉTI

ALISON DLEAU BOLO BOU

MALTRÈSSÈ MAMBO. A special form of Èzilie as priestess.

MALTRÈSSÈ ESPAGNOLÈ, or **PACONOLÈ**. A person mounted by this Èzilie talks only Spanish. [787, 791]

SOBO, or **SOBOO**. A thunder deity who hurls stones to the earth when angered. Some of the stones thrown by Sobò are regarded as the sacred residence of various loa. Sobò (or Sogbo) is a member of the original Thunder pantheon of Dahomey. [776, 171]

SOBO BADI, or **SOBO BADI**, or simply **BADI**. A close relative of Sobò, regarded as the protector of the house (badi). In Dahomey, Badi is sometimes referred to as the son of the deity Sobò.

²[See Ellis, *The Ewe-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa*, pp. 47-49; and Herskovits, *Dahomey*, II, 245ff. Cf. P. 354, Category 116. -- Analyst]

³[Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 52. Cf. P. 354, Category 116. -- Analyst]

⁴[Herskovits, *op. cit.*, pp. 152ff. Cf. P. 354, Cat. 116. -- Analyst]

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relations between the husband and the wife's family, it is nevertheless commonplace for men who can afford it to have more than one wife.

[184] Simpson, in "Sexual and Familial Institutions in Northern Haiti," *American Anthropologist*, October-December, 1942, p. 196, observes that in northern Haiti there are three distinct types of plaçage. "A *franc-caille* shares her mate's house, while a *maman pinie* is a woman who has been children for a man without living in his house. A *franc plaçe* does not live in her consort's house, and she has given him no children." Although none of these women has any legal rights of inheritance, Simpson notes, "moral claims to a man's property stand in descending order for these three classes of plaçage."

[28] 000 "Johnson, *The Negro in the New World*.

"UNESCO, *The Haiti Pilot Project*, p. 18.

"Simpson, "Haitian Peasant Economy," *Journal of Negro History*, October, 1940, p. 315.

[19] 296 The group work patterns of Haiti show a common ancestry with Negro gang work patterns in the United States. While nothing as formalized as the cumbite persists among American Negroes, similarities are striking. The emphasis on rhythm, the swinging of banners or picks in unison, the need for a singing leader, the responsive chorus, and the frequent use of some kind of percussion to keep time, all derive from a common concept of the nature of group work.

[21] 000 "Hervanius, "Some Aspects of Dahomean Ethnology," *Africa*, Vol. V (July, 1932), pp. 266-296.

[21] 331 "Cardinali, *Tales Told in Togoland* (p. 109), observes that among the Krachi people of Togoland "no man may have sexual intercourse with a woman for seven days before he goes hunting."

[21] 538 "An Ashanti story told by Rattray in *Ashanti Folk-Tales* credits the hodgepog with owning the original hoe; according to this version, the hoe escaped across the sea to the country of the white men, who then possessed the secret. Afterward, the white men brought many hoes to Ashanti.

000 CHAPTER III: Dancing and Dance Drama (pp. 126-136)

¹Quoted in Courlander, *Haiti Singing*, p. 75.

²Actually a banjo-like instrument of African provenience. The similarity of the word *banco* to *banjo* appears to be more than a coincidence.

³Saint-Méry, *De la danse*, as translated by Lillian Moore in "Morcan de Saint-Méry and Dance," *Dance Index*, October, 1946, p. 238.

⁴Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

⁵Brandy or rum with gunpowder is sometimes drunk by persons possessed by the loa Ogoun, deity of war.

⁶Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

⁷United Nations photograph no. 62065.

[21] 536 ⁸Students of United States Negro life will recognize the word *coonjole* as a variant of *coonfin*, a dancer known on the lower Mississippi. According to one observer, Dr. Willis James of Spelman College, Atlanta, small Negro boys on the docks used to call to the boat passengers:

"Throw me a nickel
Throw me a dime
If you want to see me
Do the coonjole."

The term *coonjole* is still used to mean hand-loading of cotton bales on river boats. When this loading was done mainly by hand some years ago, the stevedores worked rhythmically in a line and sang. An old man from Louisiana testified that within his own memory the dockside *coonjole* was accompanied by makeshift drums and other percussion.

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THE HAITIAN PEOPLE

855 Parents are generally kind to their children, so far as physical
 861 punishment is concerned. The average peasant child can hardly
 152 properly be said to be "brought up": he merely grows, eats whatever
 his family eats or whatever fruits he can pick up, and learns his place
 in the community as he matures. In anger, parents are likely to use
 in correction the first thing that comes to hand. There is a surprising
 callousness to pain among these generally kindly people: they beat
 their donkeys unmercifully, and strap harness over open sores; they
 carry chickens, head down and feet tied together and mouths gaping,
 for miles in the sun; they revel in gory cockfights. If, therefore, a
 parent is minded to beat his child, he will probably do a thorough
 [578] job of it. A peasant woman, pommeling her son with a broomstick,
 replied to the protests of a white passer-by, "*Li nèg; li pa fait li mal.*"
 ("He's a Negro; it won't hurt him.") The interference of a stranger
 in the beating of a wife by her man, armed with a club, was resented
 by both man and woman as an interference with a purely family
 quarrel.

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The concept of sexual continence is lacking among the peasants.
 Sex, indeed, hardly enters the realm of morality except in connection
 with adulterous dalliance of one man with another's woman. There
 is no virtue in abstaining from sex relations when the sexual urge is
 strong. Mothers tell love stories in all their frank details to their
 young daughters, and some who care about such matters are adept
 in all lore connected with stimulating and satisfying a man's desire.⁵

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Since huts are small and the whole family sleeps in the same room,
 children have ample opportunity to observe the sexual life of their
 parents. If a girl, as a result of her own experiments, has a child born
 to her, there is no disgrace. Practically every peasant is "illegitimate,"
 so that the term means nothing; a baby will soon be old enough to
 assist in the work of the home, thus becoming an asset. It is expected
 that as soon as a youth grows up he will find a mate and begin a
 family of his own.

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The family is as important an element of peasant life as formal
 marriage is unimportant. It is the economic unit. Ever since the days
 of Pétion Haitian economy has been one of small things: even the
 crops are small subsistence crops of maize, millet, beans, rice, yams,
 and frequently trees of bananas, plantains, and coffee, which require
 no particular cultivation. Enough coffee has been produced in Haiti
 for annual export ever since 1804, but until recent years the beans

5. See Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, pp. 22 ff.